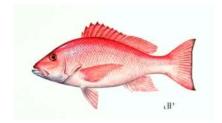# Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Frequently Asked Questions

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Why is the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery such a hot topic?
- The red snapper stock has been overfished and undergoing overfishing since the late 1980s.
- The most recent red snapper stock assessment (www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/) indicates continued overfishing is compromising the objectives of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) red snapper rebuilding plan, which is designed to phase out overfishing of red snapper in 2009 and to rebuild the red snapper stock to sustainable levels by 2032.
- All fisheries that harvest red snapper as catch and/or bycatch contribute to overfishing, including the commercial red snapper fishery, recreational red snapper fishery, and shrimp fishery.
    - Red snapper bycatch in the brown shrimp fishery, and red snapper catch and bycatch in the commercial red snapper fishery, are the primary sources of red snapper mortality in the western Gulf of Mexico.
    - Red snapper catch and bycatch in the recreational red snapper fishery is the primary source of red snapper mortality in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.
- The red snapper rebuilding plan is currently under litigation. The plaintiffs are the Coastal Conservation Association, Gulf Restoration Network, and The Ocean Conservancy.

What is a rebuilding plan?
- A rebuilding plan is a strategy used to manage harvest over a specified time period so that an "overfished" stock can increase in size to a legally mandated target level.

What amount of harvest does the red snapper rebuilding plan allow?
- The current red snapper rebuilding plan provides the commercial and recreational red snapper fisheries a combined, constant, annual total allowable catch (TAC) of 9.12 million pounds (MP), based on the findings of a 1999 stock assessment and assumed achievements in shrimp trawl bycatch.
- The rebuilding plan specifies the need for periodic reviews and adjustments as new stock assessments and assessment updates become available.

What are the current regulations in the red snapper and shrimp fisheries?
- Recreational red snapper fishery:
  - 49% of 9.12 mp TAC
  - 16" total length minimum size limit
  - 4 fish per person daily bag limit
  - Seasonal closure between November 1 and April 21
- Commercial red snapper fishery:
  - 51% of 9.12 mp TAC
  - 15" total length minimum size limit
  - Individual fishing quota (IFQ) program (effective January 1, 2007), which allocates the commercial quota among individual fishers and corporations (click here for more information on the IFQ program)
- Commercial shrimp fishery:
  - Bycatch reduction device requirement
  - Seasonal-area closure between May 15 and July 15 off Texas
  - Ten-year permit moratorium effective October 26, 2006

Why is it necessary to reduce the red snapper catch and bycatch rates of these fisheries?
- The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires fishery managers end overfishing, and achieve, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield (OY) from federally managed fish stocks.
- OY is the amount of fish that provides the greatest overall benefit to the nation, particularly with respect to providing food production and recreational opportunities, and protecting marine ecosystems.

What is the status of current action to address overfishing?
- The Council postponed discussion of needed regulatory action until January 2007, which effectively prevents NOAA Fisheries Service from implementing any permanent regulations proposed by the Council in time to address overfishing during 2007.
- If overfishing continues in 2007, then substantially more severe harvest reductions would be required in 2008 to end overfishing by 2009.
- Consequently, NOAA Fisheries Service is proposing interim measures to address overfishing of red snapper during the 2007 fishing year (click here for more information on proposed interim measures for 2007), while the Council evaluates long-term measures to address overfishing of red snapper in a joint amendment to its Reef Fish and Shrimp FMPs.